

A photograph of Lt. Gen. Charles D. Luckey, a man in a camouflage uniform and cap with three stars, gesturing with his right hand while talking to a group of soldiers. The soldiers are also in camouflage uniforms. They are on the deck of a ship, with various equipment and hoses visible in the background. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

On the Road to Awesome

An Interview With Lt. Gen. Charles Luckey

■ By Arpi Dilanian and Matthew Howard

Lt. Gen. Charles D. Luckey, chief of the Army Reserve, met 597th Quartermaster Company Soldiers in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on Oct. 21, 2017. The Soldiers were there to provide laundry and shower services to refugees affected by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. (Photo by Spc. Anthony Martinez)

As the chief of the Army Reserve and commanding general of the U.S. Army Reserve Command, Lt. Gen. Charles Luckey leads a team of more than 200,000 Soldiers and civilians across all 50 states, U.S. territories, and more than 30 countries. During his three recent combat tours and a civilian career in law, he has continually led by example. Here are his thoughts on the role the Army Reserve plays in sustaining the force.

Ready Force X is enabling readiness. Can you elaborate on the concept and the impact it will have on sustainment?

Ready Force X is a way for the Army Reserve to look at what our capabilities are, how quickly they are needed, and their current state of readiness. Given those parameters, what are the priorities and resourcing decisions? Moreover, what do we need to be doing right now to decrease the amount of time it would take to get those particular capabilities ready to go into the fight?

Look at any capability. I will pick one of my favorite notional units, an underwater mess kit repair battalion. Let's say we know we are going to need an underwater mess kit repair battalion at C+15 or C+30. I have to take a look at all the different places I have that type of formation. Is there one that's so ready to go that I can count on that formation to be able to generate that readiness? In some cases the answer may be yes, but in many cases, the answer is no.

Part of the reason is that America's Army Reserve recruits and retains Soldiers where they live and work. So I have to move force structure to those places, not try to move people to where units are. Let's say it takes three underwater mess kit repair units to make one battalion strong enough to be able to go through collective training, get the equipment it needs, and then deploy. We have to take a look at how much time it is going to take and how we can reduce that time from

mobilization to deployment.

Are there resourcing decisions I should make so some formations have a higher percentage of Soldiers already there on a full-time basis? This might help some units sustain a higher level of readiness against a steady state. Do I need to look at moving equipment to those formations so they already have everything they need to go?

It is really about analyzing what we need to do to get these formations out the door. From there, it is putting procedures in place and prioritizing work so that the post-mobilization time is decreased.

We have identified hundreds of formations across the reserve force that fall into this pool needed to generate the required capabilities for the total Army. Some people think this is just a set group of forces that are at a higher state of readiness, but it is actually an intellectual forcing function for us. So Ready Force X is not a noun; it is really a verb.

Over 78 percent of the Army's sustainment units are in the Army Reserve and National Guard. How critical is the Army Reserve's readiness for winning on the expeditionary battlefield?

It is extraordinarily important. A significant amount of capability in the Reserve is what we call unique—unique being roughly defined as 70 percent or more of the Army's entire capacity within a particular standard requirements code resides predominantly in the Army Reserve. Many sustainment functions fall into that category.

Regardless of the theater of operations, it is really about the integral role America's Army Reserve plays in immediately enabling the Army to fight on any scale. Many conversations we are having in the Army focus on how much time certain Reserve forces need to be able to provide a high degree of readiness and capability to the warfighter. If there's not going to be time to mobi-

The chief of the Army Reserve discusses some factors the Army should consider in enabling the Reserve to sustain the force.

lize those capabilities before needing them, do we also then need to have a conversation about rebalancing some force structure?

I am more than happy to have that conversation, but it needs to be informed by assumptions. If it is assumed there will be an opportunity to mobilize at least some of these capabilities before a conflict starts, I think it is fine to keep them in the reserve components.

However, if it is assumed that we will not mobilize until a conflict is already started, then I would presume you want to set the theater before it becomes hot. If you know you need certain things to do so, and those things are in the reserve components, then you have to ask if we want to mobilize before we know whether or not there is a problem. I am not here to tell you what the answer is, but those are the conversations that should take place.

How does training need to evolve to ensure the total Army is integrated to meet short-notice or unpredictable requirements?

We are working hard inside the Army Reserve to push training to the next level. One example is a new training operation we initiated last spring called Cold Steel. It was essentially a crew-served weapons gunnery exercise at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, that began in early March and extended for a little over two months. It was the largest crew-served weapons gunnery exercise in the history of the Army Reserve. Between 1908 and last spring, we had never done anything close to that.

This year, we are multiplying that level of effort by four. We are starting at Fort Hunter Liggett, California, and then we are doing it at Fort Knox [Kentucky], Fort McCoy, and Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. Part of this is to get a more rigorous, more intense training experience for more of our Soldiers. However, at the same time, we are increasing the capacity of the Army

Reserve to train itself and to reinvigorate core competencies—training to standard and knowing what right looks like. Ultimately, we are working to sustain that level of readiness across the force in a more efficient and effective way. And we are going to continue to up our game when it comes to getting after combat readiness, capability, and lethality.

We are also going to a different construct when it comes to how we train from a sustainment perspective. We are teaming very closely with both the active component and the National Guard to have opportunities to train together as a total Army team. Whether it is at the National Training Center, Joint Readiness Training Center, or other places, we are making more of the enabling formations integral parts of that training experience.

We are also making sure certain types of reserve formations are supporting other combat arms formations, so they are getting more realistic and demanding training. We are on the “road to awesome” when it comes to getting better at how we train.

What advice do you have for reservists on balancing civilian employment with their military service?

Our responsibility inside the Army Reserve is fundamentally to be ready enough to be relevant, but not so ready that our Soldiers cannot keep good, meaningful civilian jobs and maintain some semblance of healthy, blissfully happy family lives. That can be a challenge, and I do not want to tell you that it is always easy.

I spent years in traditional troop program unit formations as an Army Reserve Soldier. There were times when, weekend after weekend, I wasn’t doing something that somebody else thought I should; but then there were weeks and years away from my job. Those are choices that we make. We have to balance all three aspects of our lives: generating the capabilities the Army requires,

keeping our civilian employers happy to the point where we still have jobs, and keeping our families happy and sustaining.

My responsibility as the leader of this team is making sure I am getting the best possible ways to support families and alleviate burdens so they are more willing and able to support their Soldiers. This is America’s Army Reserve: 195,000 Soldiers across 20 time zones and with 350,000 family members. Most of them—92 percent—have civilian jobs, primarily in the private sector.

I am also trying to influence those employers. If you are sharing the best talent in your company with me, then we are now partners in making sure the national security fabric of the United States is being sustained. That is a big deal. They are probably taking some risks to their bottom line by doing that, and to me, that is more than talking. That is doing.

So I try to honor that sharing arrangement, that partnership, by not taking those Soldiers for longer than we need them. However, by the same token, if we need them to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America against all enemies foreign and domestic, we need them.

I also make sure I am putting pressure on the nation to recognize that if we want to continue this way of doing business, then part of the deal is to share this great talent. Less than one percent of folks in America serve in uniform. So this is part of how we bring the capability to the nation for a massive discount as opposed to paying for a full-time force across the board.

How does the Army Reserve attract and retain talent?

The Army Reserve has a unique opportunity, and therefore a unique obligation, to be a screening force for the Army and the Department of Defense. We have to make sure we are tapping into our linkage with private-sector America and leveraging Sol-



Lt. Gen. Charles Luckey is the chief of the Army Reserve and commanding general of the U.S. Army Reserve Command.

diers who are working everywhere.

We have Soldiers whose day jobs are at Google, SpaceX, or Tesla. They are working on cutting-edge technologies, like quantum computing, cyber technology, and artificial intelligence. They are out there, so we are moving force structure. It does not cost anything because I am not moving anybody; we are just moving structure so we can go out and capture this talent.

Say there's a Soldier who's been trained and paid by the Army to learn a unique skill, such as cyber security. The Soldier goes to an Army cyber brigade, and they serve their time. After five or six years, they may decide to leave active duty and go work in the private sector, taking the skills they have learned and leveraging them to potentially make more money.

At that point, they will move somewhere, so we are anticipating where they are going to move. We put force structure in places like Palo Alto or Mountain View, California, or Cambridge, Massachusetts, and that is where I catch them. We are able to keep them on the team. That, I would

say, is the DNA of the Army Reserve.

The Reserve started in 1908 with a very simple idea: get the best medical talent in America to be able to build the capacity of the Army very dramatically, very quickly, but only when it is needed. By keeping that talent at a very high state of readiness, you could leverage it and put it on the battlefield without having to pay for it all the time. So we brought doctors into the Army when we needed them, doctors who had been working in emergency rooms all over America, patching up people who had been knifed and shot.

All we did was put a uniform on them, give them a haircut, make sure they could do a few situps, give them a weapon, let them at least learn how to not shoot themselves or their buddies, and we called them Army doctors! I mean, no offense to the Army medical community, but it was brilliant! We brought in people who had hundreds of thousands of dollars of training invested in them that we did not pay for.

There are other places where we can do this: cyber, artificial intelligence, and other digital domains. I think the Army Reserve has a unique ability to leverage that talent, bring it in, and keep it in the Army. We are already doing it.

What is the single biggest thing the Army Reserve needs to do right now?

Keep pounding. Let me put it this way, when I first started as the leader of this team a little over a year and a half ago, I had gone down to Guantanamo Bay and over to Puerto Rico. We were flying back, and one of my senior leaders said, "Hey boss, on this road to awesome, how are we going to know when we get to awesome?"

I am like, "Dude, you do not get to awesome; it is out there! You get awesomer every day, but you do not actually get there because it keeps moving!"

The future keeps evolving, and all kinds of things are driving that very high velocity of change. The biggest

thing I am pushing hard on across every aspect of what we are doing is trying to sustain relentlessly a shift in culture.

The Army Reserve has to understand that what we have been doing for the past 16 years does not work in the current contingency surge model. The old progressive readiness model with multiple-year iterations and a rotational model—where one unit is supposed to be ready now, next year it is another unit, and the year after is yet another unit—that does not work. So the ethos of the Army Reserve has to change.

This is a "fight fast" force. You will not hear me say "fight tonight," other than to say, "I do not say fight tonight." My point is the active component is supposed to fight tonight. I spent years in the 82nd Airborne Division; I spent time in the special operations forces. I understand "fight tonight." We are not your "fight tonight" force. However, we will fight fast.

So this team needs to embrace the culture of being able to fight fast, of being ready. When I talk about combat readiness, capability, and lethality, I am talking about a force that fundamentally didn't see itself that way five years ago. Back then, the motto was "A life-saving, life-sustaining force for the nation." However, at the risk of being brutally honest, that is not our core competency.

You have an Army to win the nation's wars. So being ready for combat has to be fundamental to what America's Army Reserve is doing to build capability for the Army. We are getting there.

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